

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSAE-00
NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 DEAE-00
IO-13 JUSE-00 SNM-02 TRSE-00 OES-07 OMB-01 AID-05
/094 W

-----063547 060132Z /65

O 052030Z JUL 77

FM AMCONSUL BELIZE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5699

INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY MEXICO IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BELIZE 0434

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SNAR

SUBJECT: LOCAL REACTION TO PRESS ARTICLE LINKING BELIZEAN
OFFICIALS TO NARCOTICS TRAFFIC

REF: JOHNSON-GAWF JULY 1 TELECON

1. SUMMARY: BELIZEAN PRESS AND OFFICIALS CITED HAVE REACTED
STRONGLY TO MIAMI HERALD ARTICLE. PREMIER PRICE IS CONCERNED
OVER POLITICAL DAMAGE. OTHER NAMED OFFICIALS ARE INDIGNANT.
OPPOSITION PRESS HAVING A FIELD DAY. GOVERNOR DISSATISFIED WITH
USG HANDLING OF INCIDENT. PUBLIC AMUSED BUT SKEPTICAL OF
PREMIER'S INVOLVEMENT. DEPARTMENT ASKED TO CONSIDER HOW WE
MIGHT SOFTEN BLOW TO OUR RELATIONS WITH PRICE. END SUMMARY.

2. PREMIER PRICE'S REACTION TO MIAMI HERALD ARTICLE AS EXPRESSED
TO ME IN CONVERSATION AT AIRPORT JULY 3 WAS ONE OF HURT FEELINGS,
DISMAY AND INCOMPREHENSION. HE SAID THE DAMAGE DONE TO HIM
POLITICALLY WOULD BE SERIOUS UNLESS THE USG COULD MAKE
SOME KIND OF HELPFUL STATEMENT. HE WAS PARTICULARLY RESENTFUL
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OVER ARTICLE'S ASSERTION, WHICH HE DENIED, THAT HE HAD
REFUSED TO TALK TO THE HERALD REPORTER. HE HAD SIMPLY NOT
BEEN IN HIS OFFICE WHEN THE CALL CAME THROUGH AND REPORTER
HAD MADE NO FURTHER EFFORT TO REACH HIM. AS MATTERS STOOD,
HE FELT HE HAD BEEN ACCUSED, TRIED AND CONVICTED BY DEA WITHOUT
HAVING HAD A CHANCE TO ADDRESS THE CHARGES LEVELLED AT HIM.
COMMENT: HAVING RECEIVED WORD (REF TELECON) THAT NEITHER DEPT

NOR DEA PLANNED TO MAKE ANY STATEMENT IN THIS MATTER I WAS UNABLE TO ASSUAGE PREMIER'S FEELINGS VERY MUCH. HE SAID HE INTENDED TO RAISE MATTER DURING SCHEDULED MEETING WITH HABIB: I FOUND IT NOTEWORTHY THAT IN THE COURSE OF FAIRLY EXTENSIVE COMMENT ON THE SUBJECT PREMIER HAD NOTHING TO SAY IN DEFENSE OF MINISTERS ROGERS AND SYLVESTOR OR LEBANESE CONSUL ABOU-NERA, WHO HAD ALSO BEEN NAMED IN HERALD ARTICLE.

3. SYLVESTER HAD CALLED AT CONGEN JULY 2 AND ABOU-NERA JULY 3 TO DENY CHARGES AND TO COMPLAIN VOCIFEROUSLY ABOUT THE DAMAGE DONE TO THEM BY ARTICLE. BOTH DEMANDED AN OFFICIAL STATEMENT CLARIFYING U.S. GOVERNMENT'S POSITION AS TO WHETHER THEY WERE IN FACT SUBJECTS OF INVESTIGATION AND IF SO WHY AND WHETHER THEY WERE STILL UNDER A CLOUD. BOTH OFFERED TO SUBMIT TO ANY INTERROGATION DEA MIGHT WISH TO UNDERTAKE.

4. I HAVE HEARD NOTHING FROM MINISTER ROGERS.

5. HERALD ARTICLE RECEIVED FRONT PAGE TREATMENT IN ALL LOCAL NEWSPAPERS OVER THE WEEKEND. OPPOSITION PAPERS "REPORTER" AND "BEACON" REPRINTED THE ARTICLE VERBATIM. "AMANDALA", ALWAYS MORE IMEGINATIVE, IN ARTICLE SYMPATHETIC TO PREMIER SAW DEA, CIA AND THE GUATEMALANS, ALL JOINING FORCES TO TOPPLE THE PRICE GOVERNMENT. GOVT NEWSPAPER "BELIZE TIMES" CARRIED BRIEF FRONT PAGE STATEMENT THAT PREMIER HAD DENIED ANY KNOWLEDGE OF ALLEGED DRUG ACTIVITIES. "TIMES" ALSO SUMMARIZED HERALD CONFIDENTIAL

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ARTICLE ON PAGE BY EMPHASIZING IN BOLD TYPE THE PHRASE "WITH THE AIM OF IMPLICATING THE BELIZEAN GOVERNMENT AND CREATING A POLITICAL SCANDAL THAT WOULD CAUSE THEM TO FEEL IN DISREPUTE". AGAIN, NO MENTION OF ROGERS, SYLVESTER OR ABOU-NER.

6. GOVERNOR MC ANTEE, WITH WHOM I HAVE BEEN IN CLOSE TOUCH THROUGHOUT THIS EPISODE, LEFT NO DOUBT THAT HE WAS MOST DISSATISFIED WITH ABSENCE OF ANY OFFICIAL U.S. STATEMENT AND TOLD ME HE WOULD BE URGING FCO TO HAVE THE BRITISH EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON APPROACH DEPARTMENT REQUESTING ONE.

7. COMMENT AROUND TOWN HAS BEEN LARGELY IN VEIN OF AMUSEMENT, ALTHOUGH MIXED WITH DISBELIEF AND INDIGNATION RE INCLUSION OF PREMIER PRICE IN ARTICLE'S ALLEGATIONS. THAT THE OTHER THREE MAY BE INVOLVED IN DRUG-RELATED ACTIVITIES IS AN OFT-HEARD RUMOR HERE.

8. COMMENT: EVEN BEFORE THIS EPISODE PREMIER PRICE WAS IN A TIGHT SPOT POLITICALLY. HIS OPPOSITION HAS BEEN PRESSING FOR THE GOB TO AGREE TO SUBMIT ANY MOVE TOWARD INDEPENDENCE TO A NATIONAL REFERENDUM BEFORE PROCEEDING WITH IT. PREMIER'S POSITION IS THAT RESULTS OF PREVIOUS ELECTIONS CONSTITUTE

MANDATE FOR INDEPENDENCE. BELIZE CITY MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS SCHEDULED FOR NOVEMBER WHICH PRICE'S PARTY IS LIKELY TO LOSE MIGHT WELL STRENGTHEN OPPOSITION ARGUMENT THAT PRICE DOES NOT HAVE THE COUNTRY BEHIND HIM IN HIS PRESENT PUSH FOR INDEPENDENCE. THESE ARE THE CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH HAVE MADE THE HERALD ARTICLE A PARTICULARLY PAINFUL BLOW FOR THE PREMIER. ONE EFFECT WE CAN EXPECT FROM THE EPISODE IS THAT HIS ABILITY TO BE FLEXIBLE ON ANY TERRITORIAL CESSION OPTIONS, NEVER VERY GREAT, HAS BEEN FURTHER REDUCED.

9. RECOMMENDATION: I AM NOT INFORMED (BUT WOULD LIKE TO BE) AS TO WHY THE DEPARTMENT DECIDED NOT TO AUTHORIZE ANY COMMENT ON THE HERALD ARTICLE. PERHAPS THE PATTERN OF PREVIOUS EVIDENCE AGAINST ROGERS, SYLVESTER AND ABOU-NERA WAS CONFIDENTIAL

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DEEMED SUCH AS TO MAKE INADVISABLE ANY OFFICIAL STATEMENT WHICH MIGHT APPEAR EXCULPATORY. SUCH AN ARGUMENT SEEMS AROUND ENOUGH, BUT IT WOULD NOT SEEM APPLICABLE TO PREMIER PRICE SINCE. IF I AM CORRECTLY INFORMED, HE DOES NOT HAVE AN ILLICIT NARCOTICS FILE LIKE THAT OF SOME OF HIS HENCHMEN AND SINCE THE EVIDENCE AGAINST HIM IN THE BREWER CASE IS FAR FROM CONCLUSIVE. ON THE ASSUMPTION THAT WE WOULD PREFER TO HAVE PRICE FRIENDLY RATHER THAN OTHERWISE, I RECOMMEND DEPARTMENT CONSIDER WHAT MIGHT BE DONE TO MITIGATE THE UNFORTUNATE CONSEQUENCES THIS EPISODE CAN BE EXPECTED TO HAVE FOR HIM. THE LEAST WE COULD DO, IT SEEMS TO ME, IS TO TELL HIM WE REGRET ANY DAMAGE OR EMBARRASSMENT THE INCIDENT MAY HAVE CAUSED HIM.
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Message Attributes

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Decaption Note:
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Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
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Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
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Executive Order: GS
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